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INTERNET GAMING SYSTEM

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates to an Internet gaming system and a method associated therewith and, more particularly, a gaming system and method for purchasing lottery tickets and tracking the results therefor over the Internet.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

There are many ways of purchasing lottery tickets and tracking the results. A purchaser can buy a lottery ticket from a vendor in a local market and track the results by watching television or listening to the radio upon or after announcement of the winning results. Purchasers often form a group for procuring a large number of tickets in order to increase the probability of winning the lottery. If a group of purchasers desire to purchase a number of tickets, they may designate a single purchaser who buys the tickets from a

vendor and tracks the results for the whole group. Upon learning the results, the designated purchaser informs each individual in the group of the results. This process is repeated for every bulk purchase for the group, e.g., as often as the group desires or on a periodic basis.

This conventional method of purchasing lottery tickets for a group of purchasers becomes unduly burdensome as the size of the group increases, or if the members of the group are located in distant geographical locations. Furthermore, purchasing becomes logistically cumbersome as the group desires to purchase lottery tickets from various states or foreign jurisdictions. Therefore, a need exists in the art for an improved lottery purchasing system and method with result tracking capability for a plurality of purchasers.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates to a gaming system and method for purchasing lottery tickets and tracking the results therefor over the Internet. End users can purchase lottery tickets of different states online. The lottery tickets are electronically tracked (win or lose) and the results are forwarded to the purchasers via the Internet, e.g., by electronic mail (e-mail) or posting the results on a designated website.

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Sub 7 In a preferred embodiment, the invention provides a system for purchasing lottery tickets over the Internet comprising at least one server and at least one computer connected to the at least one server via the Internet. The at least server hosts at least one virtual group of lottery ticket purchasers, and stores group information for the virtual group. The at least one server also stores lottery information about at least one lottery. The at least one server causes the lottery tickets to be purchased for the purchasers according to the group

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information and the lottery information. The at least one server then communicates the results of the purchases of lottery tickets to the purchasers on the basis of the group information.

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In another embodiment, the invention provides a method for purchasing lottery tickets over the Internet in a system including at least one server and at least one computer, where the at least one server stores group information a virtual group of purchasers of lottery tickets, and lottery information on at least one lottery. The method according to the embodiment comprises the steps of (a) electronically purchasing the lottery tickets according to the group information and the lottery information; (b) communicating results of the lottery ticket purchasers to the purchasers using the group information; and (c) repeating steps (a) and (b) according to the group information and the lottery information, unless any of the group information and the lottery information is caused to be changed.

In a further preferred embodiment virtual groups (in the form of chat rooms) are formed online. Members of the virtual groups can access the chat rooms using an Internet service provider to purchase lottery tickets and check the results.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The foregoing and other advantages and features of the invention will become more apparent from the detailed description of the preferred embodiments of the invention given below with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is a diagram generally illustrating an Internet gaming system according to the invention;

FIG. 2 is a diagram illustrating an exemplary virtual group for purchasing lottery tickets according to the invention;

FIG. 3 is a flow diagram illustrating the setup of an exemplary virtual group for purchasing lottery tickets according to the invention; and

5 FIG. 4 is a flow diagram illustrating an exemplary operation of a chat room for a group of lottery purchasers according to the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

FIG. 1 is a diagram that illustrates an Internet gaming system according to the invention in general. The system according to the invention comprises at least one server (e.g., servers 101, 102 . . .) and at least one computer (e.g., computers 111, 112 . . .) connected to the at least one server over the Internet, e.g., using an Internet service provider such as America Online™ (AOL™) or Prodigy™. An Internet service provider or ISP is a service, commercial or otherwise, that provides access to the Internet for end users. The servers 101, 102 . . . are connected to the Internet via connections (e.g., connections 121, 122 . . . , respectively) such as a modem line, a T1 line or any variant of digital subscriber line (DSL) including ADSL (advanced digital subscriber line). The computers 111, 112 . . . are connected to the Internet via connections (e.g., connections 131, 132 . . . , respectively) such as a modem line, a T1 line or any variant of digital subscriber line (DSL) including ADSL (advanced digital subscriber line). Purchasers of lottery tickets, as end users at one of the computers can access a server over the Internet using the service provided by the ISP.

The servers (101, 102 . . .) can send information to the purchasers of lottery

tickets by communicating with the computers (111, 112 . . .) over the Internet (e.g., via connections 121, 122 . . . and 131, 132 . . ., respectively), the at least one telephone (e.g., tel 143, 144 . . .) over landline 134, the at least one fax (e.g., fax 145, 146 . . .) over landline 135, or the at least one cellular telephone (e.g., 147, 148 . . .) over the airwaves or via satellite by using transmitter 141 provided therefor. If a group of purchasers desires to purchase lottery tickets in bulk, a virtual group is created therefor at a server which includes corresponding information with respect to the group of purchasers (group information) and the purchasing of the lottery tickets (lottery information).

FIG. 2 is a diagram that illustrates an exemplary virtual group for purchasing lottery tickets for a group of purchasers according to the invention. In a database or archive at a server (e.g., server 101 shown in FIG. 2), information is stored for an exemplary virtual group 21 corresponding to the group information and the lottery information with respect to the purchasers. The storage device can be any storage device such as a hard disk, a floppy drive, a tape drive, a CD-ROM (compact disc, read only memory), a CD-RW (compact disc read or write memory) or a non-volatile memory. The information includes e.g., the member list 201 which includes biographical information about each of the purchasers in the group and the member e-mail 202, which includes electronic mail (e-mail) addresses for the purchasers (if any). Other information includes the member tel 203, which includes the telephone numbers for the purchasers (if any); the member fax 204, which includes the fax numbers for the purchasers (if any); the member cell 205, which includes the cellular telephone numbers for the purchaser (if any); and the lottery type 206, which includes the types of lottery tickets the purchasers desire to procure (e.g., the state lottery of any of the 50

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states in the U.S. or the provinces of Canada, the lottery sponsored by any U.S. territory such as Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands). Additional information includes the purchase volume 207, which includes the number of lottery tickets the purchasers desire to procure; the purchase interval 208, which includes the frequency of the lottery ticket purchases; the number selection 209, which includes the manner and method for selecting entry numbers for the lottery tickets (e.g., computer-generated or arbitrary number selection); the distribution method 210, which includes the manner of delivering the lottery tickets to the purchasers (if needed); the notice method 211, which includes the method of notifying the purchasers of the results of the lottery ticket drawings; the tracking interval 212 which includes the frequency of monitoring or tracking the results of the lottery ticket drawings; the payment method 213, which includes the method of payment designated by the purchasers for the purchasing of the lottery tickets (e.g., credit cards or wire transfer); and the website post 214, which includes the manner of displaying the results for viewing by the purchasers, e.g., by posting the results at a website designated by the purchasers, or at a chat room created for the virtual group 21 which is accessible by the purchasers. A chat room is a service provided by Internet service providers where designated members of the chat room can discuss matters of interest to them (e.g., the lottery tickets) over the Internet.

Sub. C' > FIG. 3 is a flow diagram that illustrates the setup of an exemplary virtual group 21 created at the server 101 for purchasing lottery tickets for a group of people according to the invention. To create the virtual group 21, group information for the purchasers is stored in the server 101 in step 301. The group information comprises, e.g., the member list 201, which includes biographical information for each of the purchasers in

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the group; the member e-mail 202, which includes electronic mail (e-mail) addresses for the purchasers (if any); the member tel 203, which includes the telephone numbers for the purchasers (if any); the member fax 204, which includes the fax numbers for the purchasers (if any); and the member cell 205, which includes the cellular telephone numbers for the purchaser (if any). In step 302, the lottery information with respect to the lottery tickets the purchasers desire to procure is stored in the server 101. The lottery information comprises, e.g., the lottery type 206, which includes the types of lottery tickets the purchasers desire to procure (e.g., the state lottery of any of the 50 states in the U.S. or the provinces of Canada, the lottery sponsored by any U.S. territory, such as Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands); the purchase volume 207, which includes the number of lottery tickets the purchasers desire to procure; and the purchase interval 208, which includes the frequency of the lottery ticket purchases. In step 303, the number selection 209, which includes the manner and method for selecting entry numbers for the lottery tickets, is stored in the server 101 and confirmed. The number selection can include computer-generated random numbers at the server 101, arbitrary number selection per the purchasers' entry, random number selection from a fixed pool of numbers provided by the purchasers, number generation according to a predetermined number selection algorithm provided at the server 101 or selected by the purchasers, etc. In step 304, the distribution method 210, which includes the manner of delivering the lottery tickets to the purchasers (if needed); and the notice method 211, which includes the method of notifying the purchasers of the results of the lottery ticket drawings, are stored in the server 101 and confirmed. In step 305, the tracking interval 212, which includes the frequency of monitoring or tracking the results of the lottery ticket drawings, is

stored in the server 101 and confirmed. In step 306, the payment method 213, which includes the method of payment designated by the purchasers, is stored in the server 101 and confirmed. The payment method can include credit cards, personal checks, wire transfer, automated payment and replenishment services such as EZPass™, online payment services such as PayPal™ or eBillPay™, etc. In step 307, the virtual group 21 is created at the server 101 according to the information gathered for storage in steps 301, 302, 303, 304, 305 and 306 which correspond to the group of purchasers of lottery tickets. In step 308, a chat room corresponding to the virtual group 21 is created at the server 101. Access to the chat room created for the virtual group 21 is provided for all of the purchasers (step 309), but access may be limited to the purchasers, e.g. by means of passwords.

use
tournament
match up
base on
user
preferences

FIG. 4 is a flow diagram illustrating an exemplary operation of a chat room for a group of lottery purchasers according to the invention. The chat room created for the exemplary virtual group 21 is provided by an ISP such as America Online™ (AOL™) or Prodigy™. The ISP is accessed (step 401) and the access is authorized and confirmed (step 403), e.g., by entering a valid password at the computer 111. This password is communicated to the server 101 over the Internet. In step 405, it is determined whether any of the other purchasers, i.e., other members belonging to the virtual group 21, is online, i.e., connected to the at least one server provided by the ISP via the Internet. If not, the control flow passes to step 411, i.e. the chat room is accessed. If any one of the other purchasers is online, the control flow is directed to step 407 where it is determined whether the instant messaging service (such as Instant Messenger™) has been requested. If so, all of the other purchasers who are online at the time are notified by the instant messaging service that a new

purchaser has logged on (step 409). If the instant messaging service is not requested in step 407, then the control flow is directed to step 411 where the chat room is accessed.

Once the chat room is accessed in step 411, the access is confirmed (step 413), e.g., by entering a valid password at the computer 111 which is in communication with the server 101 over the Internet. A change menu for changing the group information or the lottery information is then displayed (step 415). In step 417, it is determined whether a change in any of the group information is requested. The group information comprise, e.g., the member list 201, which includes biographical information for each of the purchasers in the group; the member e-mail 202, which includes electronic mail (e-mail) addresses for the purchasers (if any); the member tel 203, which includes the telephone numbers for the purchasers (if any); the member fax 204, which includes the fax numbers for the purchasers (if any); and the member cell 205, which includes the cellular telephone numbers for the purchaser (if any). If no change is requested in step 417, the control flow passes to step 425. If change is requested in step 417, that change is stored in the server 101 (step 419). Any changes effecting the chat room stored and implemented as well (step 421). Once the change is authorized and authenticated in step 423, the control flow is directed to step 425.

In step 425, it is determined whether in any of the lottery information is requested. The lottery information comprises, e.g., the lottery type 206, which includes the types of lottery tickets the purchasers desire to procure (e.g., the state lottery of any of the 50 states in the U.S. or the provinces of Canada, the lottery sponsored by any U.S. territory such as Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands); the purchase volume 207, which includes the number of lottery tickets the purchasers desire to procure; the purchase interval 208, which

lottery. If not, the chat room access is concluded (step 443). If information is requested for a specific lottery, an information menu is displayed for that lottery in step 439. The information menu can include selections such as lottery history, winning probability, demographic information, etc. The selected information is displayed in step 441. The control flow then passes to step 437. If no other information is then requested for a specific lottery, the chat room access is concluded (step 443).

Although the invention has been particularly shown and described in detail with reference to the preferred embodiments thereof, the embodiments are not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise forms disclosed herein. It will be understood by those skilled in the art that many modifications in form and detail may be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Similarly, any process steps described herein may be interchangeable with other steps to achieve substantially the same result. All such modifications are intended to be encompassed within the scope of the invention, which is defined by the following claims and their equivalents.